

# "I Like It!" Experiencing Mediascapes in the Artisanship of Prahova County

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## ABSTRACT

My text is an attempt at developing the heuristic potentialities in the *escapology* of video recording of anthropological fieldwork and, based on this, in the museum practice of posting videos via social media platforms. Ethnographic information is provided for various crafts from Prahova County (wind-instrument making, weaving, and painting) to illustrate both the artisans' views of their own craftwork and artefacts and the online responses elicited by such arguments, evidence, ideas, etc. Distinctive and interrelated cultural scenes and *dramatis personae* are identified and discussed in regards with: (1) doing ethnography and artisan *profiles*; (2) the museum policy of posting video fieldwork records and interviews; and (3) *feedback* in the form of *predefined emotions* and comments from *friends, followers*, or simply *visitors* of video posts. The article will provide a theoretical approach to the interpretive *continuum* and interactive reflexivity between artisans (as bearers of folk culture), museum specialists (as promoters of curatorial and research projects), and the online audience of folk art traditions and museum programs.

## KEYWORDS

Craftsmanship; ethnographic videos; interpretive continuum; mediascapes; online posting.



## Introduction

This text is quite an unexpected result of that strange and controversial state of doing ethnography in times of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. In the summer of 2020, when I was still involved in a program documenting traditional artisanship in Prahova County—in the framework and with the support of Prahova Natural Science Museum, a county-level museum based in Ploiești—I needed to conduct short interviews with several local craftspeople. The concerns about maintaining the distance from my interlocutors required by the pandemic aside, I constantly endeavored to

make video records of my fieldwork sessions. Initially video recording seemed to be just another routine method to keep evidence from the field that would eventually end up in the existing archives of museums or research departments. However, in my case, this documentary technique was to take another somewhat bizarre route, namely online (institutional) posting.

Of course, it would be illusory to claim that uploading ethnographic videos might still be regarded today as innovative in either anthropological culture or social media contemporary popular culture. Ethnologists, journalists, bloggers, freelancers, or other individuals managing their private online accounts are or may become potential hosts

or broadcasters of films about traditional lifestyles, folk heritage, crafts, artefacts, rituals, and so on.<sup>1</sup> The point is whether or not such heterogeneous categories of people who post (or at least some of them) can indeed share their reflection on what makes a video record ethnographic and, if so, whether or not a record thus defined is theoretically valid. It is with this (supposedly) disciplinary meaning that I will refer to the practice of online posting, as a case study representative for further anthropological conceptualization.

Before introducing the case, in order to explain its institutional framework, I need to return to the context of the epidemiological crisis that, like so many other countries of the world, Romania had to cope with in the spring of 2020. In fact, Romanian public institutions were asked to adapt their working programs and schedules to the state of emergency enforced nationally for one month, starting with the March 16, 2020. For Prahova Natural Science Museum, this implied restricting visitor access and, consequently, an increasingly urgent need for the museum staff (including myself) to identify new ways to inform the public about the ongoing endeavors of local curators and researchers. Online posting, therefore, sprang up as a practical method of reporting on and “advertising” exhibitions (particularly through virtual tours), as well as collections and artefacts that otherwise, given the circumstances, the regular audience would not have been able to see.

It should be stressed that, with the prolongation of the state of emergency beyond April 16, 2020, online posting as a communication strategy quite soon became the main type of interaction between Prahova Natural Science Museum and its (equally) natural visitors, friends, partners, and so on. As a result, my colleagues and I needed to seriously think about ways to constantly provide our institution with new materials and content that would show aspects of our work and would be *liked* and distributed on

other online platforms. An ongoing museum program—Research of Folk Arts in Prahova County—made me hope that ethnography could undertake such popularizing mission.

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### Ethnographic Profiles in the Artisanship of Prahova County

In line with a scientific tradition inaugurated in 1956, Prahova Natural Science Museum (henceforth, abbreviated PNSM) is—as its name suggests—an institution devoted to a broad array of life sciences, hosting biological, botanical, and geological collections, alongside collections of paleontological fossils (both human and animal), crystals, and folk medicinal plants and herbs in storage. A laboratory for research in chemistry, biology, and mineralogy and a permanent exhibition including halls on anthropogenesis, human anatomy, genetics, biodiversity, and human population create an overall “old-school” natural history museum where humans are depicted as irreducibly belonging to their ecosystems, and also definitely indebted to them.

Before the 2010s, ethnography—understood as a science of folk culture—was largely absent formally from this panoply, as if the work of collecting, classifying, and exhibiting artefacts of local traditional groups was not sufficiently embedded in the regular agenda of a natural science museum. However, recent PNSM programs have been increasingly promoting fieldwork and research reports dealing with themes like crafts and folk arts, traditional ways of life and customs, etc. In part, this shift came out of the enduring interdependence between PNSM and Francisc Rainer Institute of Anthropology (Romanian Academy, Bucharest), an institution where cultural anthropology is traditionally integrated with other disciplinary branches like



paleoanthropology and physical anthropology. (Indeed, as a further bridge with Rainer Institute, the PNSM departmental network also includes Francisc Rainer Museum of Anthropology, in Cheia, Prahova County). On the other hand, PNSM has quite naturally enlarged its research paradigm benefiting from the generous environment created by several Prahova local crafts, such as ceramics, metalwork, woodcarving, etc. This is the context in which—from 2018 to 2021—I became involved in PNSM's Research of Folk Arts in Prahova County program.

In June and July 2020, between the first two waves of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic in Romania, I visited a number of artisans in the Romanian villages of Izvoarele and Măneciu (northern Muntenia). A folk culture consultant and director of Măneciu Cultural Centre, Lidia Pavel generously helped me to find my way to two local artisans, Adrian Mihaiu, a wind instrument maker, and Lila Miroiu, a weaver, recommending me to them as a representative of Prahova Natural Science Museum. I similarly benefited from the open support of Ioan Diaconu, director of Izvoarele Cultural Center, in identifying several folk artists, among whom Maria Cîrpoi, a wood and canvas painter. As administrative departments of the Izvoarele and Măneciu municipalities, the two cultural centers are responsible for preserving and developing the heritage of traditional art and folklore in the area, through initiatives such as revitalizing folk music and choreography among new generations and protecting and promoting traditional peasant crafts still practiced by today's villagers.

I was therefore interested in the possibility of observing the craftwork and artwork of my interlocutors in the very ambiance of their home-based workshops. (I saw this as preferable to interviewing and taking photos with/of craftspeople invited to local folk fairs). Under the rigors of pandemic legal restrictions, and especially seeking to respect elementary conditions of sanitary vigilance for my informants and for myself,

I engaged in dialogue wearing my mask and keeping the sessions short, within the limits of first contacts that could later, once public health would go back to normal, give way to further and deeper investigation.

As a means of keeping track of my inevitably transient sessions, I continuously made use of my smartphone camera, which, while hardly comparable with a professional device in terms of video recording quality, at least presented the advantage of being portable—and similar to the smartphones or cell phones that are widespread today among Prahova villagers too. I would infer that smartphone use, especially to exchange phone numbers with my interlocutors, served as a means of *identity disclosure* between us, revealing its practicality when it came to making future appointments.<sup>2</sup> There is no need to argue that such visual evidence (even if modestly recorded) was expected by PNSM as proof that "I [as a museum employee] had been there!" and that the same images could represent minimal references for later returning to the field.

In terms of the interview structure, the talks with the Prahova craftspeople generally followed the line of life histories, as my interlocutors evoked their childhood experiences in learning their arts, the development in time of their work, their family framework of activity, and current details of doing artisanry. As already mentioned, our discussions took place in the workshops set up inside the houses of the artisans (which thus became a distinct and productive component of local households). Besides, in both Izvoarele and Măneciu, the artisans I met considered it relevant for their crafts not only to show me how they carve, weave, and paint, but also to let me see (and film) small collections of artefacts they had made and now displayed on the walls of private guestrooms or preserved in wooden chests.



Adrian Mihaiu (AM, born in 1982, one of my first interlocutors) lives in the village of Chiciureni (a small hamlet administratively incorporated in the Măneciu village). AM is a maker of wind instruments (flutes and whistles) who remembers how, when aged “seven to eight,” *As I was going to sheepfold works, there was a shepherd grazing his flock, and playing such a whistle. I liked it so much hearing him playing. I was so delighted hearing it!* Our informant says he actually learned playing his whistles alone (at the age of thirteen), all the more so as *folk songs were already in my memory ...* However, he claims not to have followed a local tradition in his craft (such as one inherited from his parents), and that *for the first big flute I made, I lacked a template for at least what it looked like!* Instead, AM used photographs of such instruments, “multiplying” to “millimeters” the scale of such images to obtain the actual size of a big flute! AM’s wind instruments are mainly made of an assortment of woods, including ash, beech, plum, and sycamore, which he gets from *the surrounding area*. Such wood varieties should be stored *in the shade, for at least two years in order for the wood to become malleable enough to cleave and hollow*. Our informant also describes his tools and devices such as a circular saw, gimlets or borers *fit for the making of either big flutes, or small whistles and suited to all the tonalities*. His flutes are appropriately tuned in “La [A]”, “Si [B] minor”, “Flat Si [B]”, “Flat Mi [E]”, and “Re [D]”, in accordance with *the position of the holes, with the main sound coming out the length of pipe*. While recognizing that his instruments *are no longer played or used in our area*, AM tells us he currently teaches this craft to local children (including his own), and that these apprentices make up a folklore group with the support of Măneciu Cultural Community Center.

In Măneciu village, Lila Miroiu (LM, born in 1935) is a weaver that has been practicing her craft—*God’s gift*—for *more than fifty years now*. Indeed, in tracing back the origins of this folk art in her family, LM invokes *grandmother-to-mother* inter-generational transmission (as in the case of the *Gillyflower* motif), reflected in the *150-year old* weaving loom that our interlocutor still keeps open in one of the rooms in her house (LM complains about the current state of her tool as follows: *Just look at how ugly it is, I didn’t manage to repair it!*). One of LM’s daughters (who lives in Ploiești) used to weave using the loom, *without caring too much* [about the craft] *however*. Artefacts like the *carpecioare* (little carpets), as woven by LM, are still wrapped around wooden seats and tables inside her house, while blankets and rugs drape and cover the walls and the floors of the same dwelling. However, as she offers most of her textiles to customers (although at rather low prices), LM says that *had I woven only for myself, my whole yard could hardly contain it* [the textile production]! Our informant argues that her decoration motifs are “national”—even when they actually originate in printed patterns taken from modern magazines. Likewise, while the needed dyes are nowadays simply bought from village shops, in the past they were extracted from local plants: *quince leaves, onion skins, and plum tree bark*. LM’s textile artefacts thus emphasize a vivid chromatics that alternates or combines natural colors of the grey and white spun wool threads—which are also bought, and then warped), with plant-based colors like the browns or the beiges. Some of LM’s decorative themes—the *Star*, the *Round dance*—are described as *ancient motifs*, while a composition like the *Three colors* is associated with the Romanian coat of arms, and also with the [Romanian] *national folk costume*. When asked about the endurance in time of her material artefacts, our informant claimed that *we can’t live as long as they live!*

In the village of Izvoarele (6.5 kilometers far from Măneciu), Maria Ciripoiu (MC, born in 1986) is a painter and holder of a small *naive-painting* gallery in a room that also serves as her private art workshop. MC associates her talent for painting with her *primary-school passion for drawing*, with her self-taught canvas painting, as well as a later folk art training she received at a school in the neighboring village of Drajna (MC's trainers from that school are reverently evoked by our interlocutor in terms of having been *decent, aged, and experienced*). Our interlocutor uses canvas and wood (mainly beech and sometimes fir). After MC "chooses" the wood varieties from a sawmill in Măneciu village, they need drying for several months. Once sufficiently dried, beech or fir raw materials are rubbed and smoothed by emery, and then sketched in pencil. Another phase of the handwork is dyeing with gouache watercolors (provided from abroad by MC's husband). The gouaches should not be mixed with water or other watercolors like tempera or acrylic. As wood is particularly absorbent, two or three watercolor layers are needed. MC's thematic repertoire includes icons representing the Holy Virgin and angels (painted on both canvas and wood scrolls), and mostly what she categorizes as *everyday village life*, with motifs like *Animal husbandry*, *Hay collecting*, *Little shepherd and his sheep*, *Rich harvest [Pumpkin field]*, *Villager carrying a huge grape*, *Winter landscape with a fox visitor*, etc. In explaining her rich naive-painting repertoire, MC invokes as her sources of inspiration *childhood memories*, *imagining peasant life in the past*, and rural occupations (agriculture, beekeeping, viticulture, among others) that she depicts to be still practiced in her area. Our informant cannot paint two identical paintings—although she sometimes makes four or five replicas of one work. MC is indebted to the Ploiești Palace of Culture, as a promoter of her work via folk art exhibitions and confesses that her co-villagers (including new generations) find it *complicated to learn her craft*.

AM, LM, and MC might be seen as *profiles* corresponding to branches of folk craftsmanship that in many areas of contemporary Romania (including Prahova County) are if not exactly disappearing, at least increasingly difficult to encounter and (even more difficult) to record for museum conservative priorities. As a matter of fact, all our abovementioned ethnographic references seem to stay outside of classic disciplinary representations of *key informants* for one or another craft. Indeed, while AM and MC are good examples of self-taught artisans, that is, less indebted to local traditions of either wind instruments or naive painting, LM highlights *au contraire* her genealogy as a weaver. On the other hand, LM and MC show little evidence of craft mentoring and transmission to new generations of craft practitioners, unlike AM's dedication to training children. Again, whereas AM clearly proves his knowledge of

tuning wind instruments, and MC outlines her impressive *catalogue* of characters and facts of "everyday village life," LM's information on the origin and [folk] meaning of her weaving motifs is only generic in terms of their age or the national homologation of her artefacts.<sup>3</sup> There is, it seems, one trait that all three cases share: AM, LM, and MC obviously *master* important "technicalities" that stand behind the musical notes and the motifs that embellish local folk arts. Indeed, AM's mastering of *mechanics* in handling the circular saw and gimlets, LM's mastering of *ethno-botany* of plant-based extracts basic for weaving chromatics, and MC's mastering of *chemistry* of the gouache watercolors that fill the sketches she draws on wood bark, all exceed the usual approach to craftsmanship as a somewhat mysterious handwork, rooted in equally immemorial traditions, raising the question of how (after all) is artisan creativity thought of and carried out today.







## Online Posting of Ethnographic Records

As already discussed, in the spring of 2020, in times of legal restrictions on visitor physical presence, Prahova Natural Science Museum resorted to the practice of online posting as a means to broadcast and promote its activities, specialists, objects, and collections that represent and recommend this institution to a wide-reaching audience. In theory, every PNSM curator or researcher was encouraged to contribute to the museum's social media official pages with texts, photos, and videos that fitted the assignment. I have to say that, for a while, my own efforts towards fulfilling said duty were rather modest.

To my colleagues' stupefaction, I was still lacking a personal Facebook account (the main social media platform used by PNSM). When some of them asked me, "Why don't you make your own [Facebook] account?", my answer—for them a clearly disappointing, disqualifying one—was, "Why should I?" On the insistence (quite gentle however) of the PNSM management, I associated my Facebook debut with a sort of feuilleton on some "anthropological lessons on an epidemic state of affairs," which were published on the museum's page, in five *episodes* (on April 6, 9, 11, 13, and 15, 2020). My material was rather unusual—resembling rather a theoretical article in size, the text was ill-fitted for the regular Facebook post format. Besides, my feuilleton lacked pictures, which as I would later find out could hardly satisfy the followers of such a reliable platform; therefore, the painfully low number of my fairly erratic viewers—no more than fifteen or sixteen per episode—was a surprise for nobody.

During my encounters with the villagers of Măneciu and Izvoarele, I also wondered how to put the video records I was allowed to make there to better use for the museum. As I previously said, according to PNSM archiving requirements, local researchers must empty their bags on coming back home

from the field. Artefacts, photographs, or interviews thus constitute evidence for field reports and also documentary resources that are registered as such. I was convinced that my smartphone visual information could very well enjoy this respectable status for, even if as a minor part of the Research of Folk Arts in Prahova County program, it was indulgently agreed on by the PNSM directors. Was this acceptable as a better use though?

I would like to prevent a somewhat epistemocentric reflection right here. My intention is not to evaluate the qualities or the limits of doing ethnography and museum curatorial research in Romania and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> I am only interested in explaining how and why—beyond collecting and archiving documents from the field—such evidence might be usefully stored and displayed for further (potential) partners or interlocutors of the museum and the artisans themselves. This, I presumed, is or could become, the common-sense reason for posting ethnographic records online. There remained however the question, for me as a PNSM employee, "How to go about it?," and, last but not least, with what consequences for the artisan *profiles* above, as well as for the museum's online visibility.

A worldwide disciplinary event would soon provide me with an opportunity that I simply could not afford to waste. The American Association of Anthropology (AAA) chose to hold its annual *Anthropology Day* (or the AnthroDay) on February 18, 2021. To encourage local initiatives to publicize the event, the AAA posted on its own website the following announcement:

Join the celebration by hosting a virtual or safe and socially distant event in your community, school, or workplace. Due to the ongoing pandemic, we will not be distributing "swag boxes" for in-person celebrations. We do, however, have a host of resources and ideas to help you get started for your AnthroDay events.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 1: Adrian Mihaiu's presentation on the PNSM Facebook page (February 18, 2021).

Once I heard about AnthroDay, and as soon as I figured it out that such a festive event was associated with ideas of an "online event" and "socially distant event," it felt reasonable to combine this with my much more modest task of publishing something "professional" on the PNSM Facebook page. AnthroDay, I thought, would make a very good opportunity for our institution to celebrate (at least) its *natural history* tradition, not to mention its Cheia Museum of Anthropology. What about also inviting to the party one of the ethnographic profiles I had just met in the two Prahova villages? After all, it was a celebration!

As a result, on February 18, 2021, the PNSM Facebook page was dedicated to Anthropology Day. A descriptive text told the visitors:

We are happy to celebrate—together with our colleagues from all over the world—Anthropology Day, which takes place on February 18, 2021. We are pleased to remind everyone that Prahova Natural Science

Museum includes the Anthropogenesis exhibition hall (in Ploiești), as well as an Ecology and Anthropology Centre and an Anthropology Museum (both of them in Cheia, Prahova County). Moreover, through its research and curatorial museum programs, our institution is integrated into the scientific structure of the Francisc Rainer Institute of Anthropology in Bucharest, within the Romanian Academy. We warmly invite people from all over the country and abroad to visit our anthropological sections and engage in joint projects with our researchers, museographers, and conservators!

The message was accompanied by a video link to a recording of an interview with AM, our interlocutor from Chiciureni-Măneciu village (Fig. 1), in his wind instrument making workshop:

As a token of enthusiasm about and constant interest in the "science of man," we post a short video that, as recorded in the summer of 2020, is a (indirect) testimony of doing



ethnographic fieldwork during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The protagonist of the film is Adrian Mihaiu, a maker of wind musical instruments from the village of Chiuciureni-Măneciu, Prahova County, interviewed in his workshop by LP, Director of Măneciu Cultural Centre, and Marin Constantin, a researcher with both the Rainer Institute and our Museum.<sup>6</sup>

The post was rather well received by our online audience, since AM's video had 4,300 views, 112 likes (out of which thirteen hearts), two comments, and fifty-seven shares. The two comments complimented AM and wished him to keep being "very successful" at his craft; and the other expressed the same wish in the form of a prayer, "God help *Adiță* [diminutive name for Adrian] to become more and more famous!"

The online echo of the post produced a vivid impression on the PNSM management. (They even asked me how I managed to "mobilize" all those followers, as if their "horizon of expectation" precisely aimed at such content of a museum public

window. Similarly, an ethnology student from Bucharest University's Faculty of Letters wanted to know more details about my recording, keeping in mind that was already familiar with AM and his workshop in Chiciureni hamlet). Relying on these promising reactions, I proposed to the PNSM management another post issued from my previous contacts with the Prahova artisans, this time showcasing the weaver LM. The new post was published on March 5, 2021 (Fig. 2), accompanied by additional information on PNSM's Research of Folk Arts in Prahova County program and a video recording:

Continuing our ethnographic documentation on the folk arts in Prahova County, as first illustrated by our conversation with the flute maker Adrian Mihaiu from Chiciureni-Măneciu ..., we now bring to the public's attention the handicraft of weaver Lila Miroiu from Măneciu-Ungureni. We recorded images of a number of textile artefacts (such as carpets, blankets, and woolen rugs), all made by Lila Miroiu at her 150-year-old weaving loom ... Our interlocutor was also

Fig. 2: Lila Miroiu's presentation on the PNSM Facebook page (March 5, 2021).







Fig. 3: Maria Ciripoiu's presentation on the PNSM Facebook page (March 25, 2021).

very generous to give us information about her apprenticeship to the craft, about wool processing techniques (warping or dyeing with extracts of local plants), about her ornamentation motifs, and so on. Like our previous recording, this film is a result of Prahova Natural Science Museum's Research of Folk Arts program, with the support of the Francisc Rainer Museum of Anthropology and the Center for Ecology and Anthropology in Cheia, with the participation of LP, Director of the Cultural Centre in Măneciu, and of Marin Constantin ...<sup>7</sup>

The second post unfortunately scored less, with an impact of only 2,400 views, forty-one likes (out of which four hearts), and twenty-five shares. Of course, the lower interest of the PNSM [Facebook] audience should be accounted on the even lower quality of my footage, and not Auntie Lila's (as LM is called in the local community) skills at her craft. (As I would later find out, LP—my guide in the field of Măneciu—openly expressed her appreciation towards the video record featuring LM and how it advertised the

local folk arts). In any case, as far as I could ascertain from Facebook's analytics, this film did not in fact underperform in comparison with the viewer average for other posts by my colleagues at PNSM.

So, I felt I had to make a decision whether to persevere or not, posting further videos about artisanship in Prahova County. And as I was convinced that the end goal of my efforts (also including English translation and subtitles for the films) was less to increase the number of PNSM online visitors (which indisputably was a major institutional concern), and more to diffuse ethnographic information about the current state of folk crafts and artisans in the area, I considered it useful to make one more try. Another film, this time bringing into the limelight the "naive" painter MC from Izvoarele village, was submitted for posting on the PNSM social media page. It was published on March 25, 2021 (Fig. 3), accompanied by a recapitulation of the previous chapters:

We add to our series of ethnographic conversations (which started ... with Adrian





Mihaiu from Chiciureni-Măneciu and continued ... with Lila Miroiu from Măneciu-Ungureni) a new field video recording—from July 2020—which showcases Maria Ciripoiu from Izvoarele village and her gallery of naive painting on tree bark and canvas. With a keen sense of observation and a special sensitivity, Maria Ciripoiu's art renders a chronicle of her community's daily life, through representations of local peasant occupations, such as animal husbandry, vine cultivation, and beekeeping. This film is a result of the Prahova Natural Science Museum research program, with the support of the Cheia Museum of Anthropology and the participation of Marin Constantin ...<sup>8</sup>

By far, the video recording of MC was the most successful. Its metrics showed 6,200 views, 116 “likes” (out of which nine hearts), twenty-eight comments, and sixty-nine shares. Distinctive marks of this public affection were emoticons like ❤️ (red heart), 💖 (heart exclamation), 🌹 (rose), 👍 (thumbs up), and 🙌 (clapping hands). Most of the comments expressed warm congratulations for the “beauty” of MC's craft, with one emphasis on her “[creative] ambition and talent for the fine-looking [paintings].” In one case, a follower admitted that she “listened to” and “enjoyed a lot” the interview, as it was an “opportunity” for MC “to become well-known by more and more people”; the same friend (online, and possibly in real life) stated she was simply “delighted” by MC's “art,” and that she was “passionately” looking forward to meeting our naive painter. In her turn, MC conveyed her gratitude for the likes received, and especially for “the way [all of] you have the kindness to promote my work.” Thinking probably about the pandemic context in the country, Măriuca (MC's diminutive name and also her Facebook username) wished everyone “to keep in good health,” duly adding a 😊 (smiley face).

The PNSM Facebook page now offered satisfactory evidence, I concluded, for both the immediate realities of artisanship

in Prahova County and the wider public interest in this category of virtual content.<sup>9</sup> Above all, Prahova Natural Science Museum had placed itself at the crossroads of unseen and yet vibrant networks of people who were now maybe more willing than ever in the past to take a (physical) tour of the museum galleries. As for my own contribution, that is what a museum employee is for, I guess.

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### Making a Theoretical Frame: From Escapology to the Ethnographic Present via Popularizing Anthropology

I argue that the abovementioned posts about artisanship in Prahova County might be theoretically seen as examples of *mediascapes* in the contemporary world, in that they act as an (online) interplay between ideas and representations which, at the same time, are private and public, individual and institutional, self-explaining and broadly acknowledged, local and wide-reaching, etc. Alongside other instances of “global cultural flows” including *ethnoscapes*, *technoscapes*, *finanscapes*, and *ideoscapes*, “*mediascapes*” are conceptualized in relation to those

... image centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality ... [offering] to those who experience and transform them ... a series of elements (such as characters, plots and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. These scripts can and do get disaggregated into complex sets of metaphors by which people live ... as they help to constitute narratives of the “other” and proto-narratives of possible lives, fantasies which could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement (Appadurai 1990: 299).

In connection to the *feuilleton* about artisans posted on the PNSM Facebook

page, for me, the keyword in the quotation above is "scripts," which (as it will be shown) eventually come to constitute the ethnography of Izvoarele and Măneciu artisans. Indeed several characteristics, such as "narrative-based accounts," "plots," "metaphors," and "fantasies," could be quite easily attached to the dialogues we engaged in with AM, LM, and MC, also to the meanings intrinsic to them (musical notes in wind instrument making, ornamentation and chromatics in weaving and painting), to museum online display of such "[folk art] scenes," and, of course, to online visitors. The mention of external referents for what initially could have remained a local, almost obscure, instance of a documentary approach inevitably expands our *scripts*—just as in the description of *mediascapes*—towards the *others living in other places*.

It is such indefinite, ineffable *others* (among whom the ethnographer is only an ephemeral "link") that invite our reflection on the amorphous arrangement that—via online connections—brings together mainly artisans, museum staff, and their audience. Within this quorum, mapping structural composition and interrelations seems illusory: each of the above-mentioned "actors" contains their own further individualized networks that put artisans in contact with tourists and museums with educators, mobilizing, on a case to case basis, distinct groups of *friends*. A discussion about the "modern value" of authenticity, for instance, in its relationship with the commoditization of tourism, portrays not less than three categories of "experts" (curators, ethnographers, and anthropologists), each with their own notion of *authenticity* as a "quality of pre-modern life and of products produced prior to the penetration of modern Western influences"; this comes in contrast not only with "the authenticity of tourists" (with their "experiential," "recreational," and "diversionary" hypostases), but also with an "emergent authenticity" as a "socially-

constructed" and "negotiable" concept.<sup>10</sup> In this case, while the "experts" could actually be associated with what, in this text, I referred to as "museum staff," the PNSM audience (online or physical) is presumably the equivalent of "tourists" (Cohen 1988: 374–5, 378–80), as for the category of "artisans," it basically refers to "traditional artists" making objects "for a traditional purpose" in conformity with "traditional forms" (Cornet 1975 qtd in Cohen 1988: 375).

The point, then, is not to identify a network, a *newer* one among the older ones that are already classicized in terms of the mutual relationships that bind researchers to their informants and also to their research institutions.<sup>11</sup> In our own case study, the *primum movens* is not so much associated with one or another "referent" *per se*, nor is it associated with a particular structuring of them, it is instead associated with the Prahova artisans' agreement to be interviewed and video recorded as part of a PNSM curatorial program, and with the PNSM strategy to exhibit online in times of a sanitary crisis and its related restrictions on physical museum touring. At both levels, artisans and "their" museum seem to share an *aspiration for escaping the crisis* as motivated by, and materialized as, a *quest for visitors*—for both the artisan workshops and museum galleries.

To an important extent, such escapology impulse resonates with that principle of popularizing anthropology stating that "its practitioners need to engage with contemporary realities, in ways meaningful to subjects and readers and which tempt them to participate [in popularizing anthropological projects]" (MacClancy 2003: 46). The February 18, 2021 AnthroDay was, from this point of view, a meaningful way to bridge (as previously seen) a disciplinary event, on the one hand, and a natural science museum and doing artisanry in an isolated locality from Prahova County, on the other. The *bridge* was the hosting by Facebook, and the "temptation to participate" in this

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first mediascape endeavor was the very initiative to post. (The referential *triad*, this time, is composed of “[anthropology] practitioners,” “subjects,” and “readers,” the latter having the most in common with the category of *viewers* or *followers* from our own ethnographic report).

Another popularizing anthropology principle—according to which: “No present-day fieldworkers can write about peoples without knowing that their words will be read by the indigenes” (MacClancy 2003: 3)—is even more clearly related to the mediascape experience of my interlocutors from Izvoarele and Măneciu, and my own, too. Indeed, posting online video recordings of AM, LM, and MC is preceded (on the PNSM Facebook page) by brief but clear introductions of each artisan, their villages, and their craft specializations. All the posts render the ethnographer’s voice, and two of them also reveal his physical presence during the interviewing sessions. As already mentioned, the ethnographer kept in touch with his informants via phone conversations (which preceded and set further shared events in the field), making sure to obtain their consent on the online publishing of audiovisual information about them and their workshops. Feedback from the artisans’ friends (as online followers) and from acquaintances that the artisans and I shared (PNSM staff, students, among others) quickly grew into prosaic dialogues meant to enrich museum archives, into mass-media products for a larger public interest. What I particularly appreciated was to notice how people from various communities and institutional spheres generally enjoy talking about folk arts, and that the internet dissemination of ethnographic records is definitely a good thing.

A few words, however, have to be said on the process of turning the “scripts” (as “image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality”) into “complex sets of metaphors that help the people to constitute ... proto-narratives of possible lives [and]

fantasies” (see Appadurai above). Although the interviews pursued with AM, LM, and MC are essentially dialogic and to a much lesser degree evocative, as they are broadcast, they also express elements of folk philosophy particularly significant for the manner in which these artisans situate their work within the traditional *datum* of an ethnographic present.<sup>12</sup> AM’s claim that “folk songs [already] were in my memory”—in the context of his self-taught initiation in the art of wind instrument making—is fairly consistent with LM’s conviction that “we can’t live as long as they [her weaving artefacts] live!” As for MC’s “everyday village life” as a generative matrix of naive-painting characters and landscapes, it may be similarly represented as a continuum of an autarkic and traditional lifestyle. This is, I believe, the script—at the same time familiar and strange—within which the artisan local creativity and the museum’s opening to the World Wide Web are both given inspirational resources and mediascaping tools. Between what *is* felt to be immemorial and perennial, in the village temporality, and what *should be* lived as brief and up-to-the-minute, in the mass media *instantaneity*, the online narrative of artisanship “as the story goes” in Prahova County provides closer of more faraway *readers* or *viewers* with vestiges and prospects of a (sort of) *promised land*, which they can still attain—every time they happen to “like” it.

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### Instead of Conclusions: Ethnographic Drama and Social Media Profiles on a World Wide Web Museum Scene

The article cited above focusing on the broadcasting of ethnographic work reminds all of us that “we [as practitioners of anthropology] should be aware that there is an audience outside the scientific community” and, since the informants “come

to think about their ethnographies", we (the members of the "scientific community") "should include them in the processes of exchange and responding to us" (Wühelmeier 2000: 48–9). There is no need to argue on the extent to which *our* artisans have been 'included' in this text, as their presence is practically co-auctorial to the *story* of it. Indeed AM, LM, and MC are *in* not only in their workshops and exhibitions locally organized by PNSM, but also as *dramatis personae* on a much larger *cultural scene*, that of a (museum) social media page, due to which a WWW audience can see and hear "where they come from, what they are, and where they are going."

One of the consequences of such development is that the artisans from Izvoarele and Măneciu become main references on the *interpretive continuum* they engage in with their virtual *friends* and, to a smaller extent, however, with the ethnographer and the museum specialists. (As a matter of fact, PNSM's archiving program and Facebook page, as well as my own ethnographic enterprise, might be seen as auxiliary only in comparison with the prominence of the artisans as the real protagonists of the *script* and the *play* they perform on *their* ethnographic stage). It is within this *folk theater* arena that an interactive reflexivity is unleashed online on what the creative folk arts actually are or should be, on the manner in which the artisans' fame is to be built, on how the artefacts are adequately "tuned," durable, "naive," and so on.

Beyond its own curatorial agenda, Prahova Natural Science Museum certainly managed to be the friendly host of an ethnographic drama that, in its turn, needed a museum *platform* (and not simply an art gallery) in order to take place. Where PNSM required documents for its archives and database to be published online, local artisans were to discover the benefits of an institutional connection through which their work would receive public recognition

and appreciation. As for the PNSM website visitors, their perception probably was that of the spectators of a museum-administered *mise-en-scène*, able to capture and present veritable folk culture values—in any case, something much more reliable than an ordinary smartphone video recording.



## NOTES

1. A well-known example here is that of journalist Jean-Pierre Dutilleux's video recording of the Toulambi in Papua New Guinea (*Tribe Meets White Man for the First Time*, directed by Jean-Pierre Dutilleux (1976), with 380,562 views on November 22, 2021, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDzGJ9IN240](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDzGJ9IN240)). See also (as regards ethnographic realities from Romania) Dumitru Budrală's "observational film" on the "[transhumant] sheep road" [*On the Road (La drum)*], directed by Dumitru Budrală (1997), with 239,666 views on November 22, 2021, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=se9S2U\\_L1og&t=71s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=se9S2U_L1og&t=71s)].
2. In the course of August of 2020, I regularly communicated by phone with artisans from Izvoarele and Măneciu (including AM, LM, and MC) in order to plan together our travel to Cheia, where Prahova Natural Science Museum organized a folk fair with stalls exhibiting artefacts from the area.
3. The accounts of AM, LM, and MC can hypothetically be correlated to oral traditions of the crafts of wind instrument making, weaving, and wood painting, respectively, in Prahova County. From the information I gathered, I could neither confirm, nor dismiss the existence of such traditions, which, as a result, makes them open to further and deeper investigation. Apart from AM and MC who are self-taught, all our field interlocutors evoked unwritten sources for their knowledge, including (as seen before) a shepherd's flute performance (AM), matrilineal teaching of weaving (LM), and folk art training by external teachers (MC). Such trait—unwritten transmission of craftsmanship—could provisionally place our three cases in the category of the so-called "peoples without writing" (Vansina 1969: 1). On the other hand, given the very provisional status of AM, LM, and MC as bearers of (possible) older traditions in their folk arts, they could hardly constitute "links" in any "chain of [traditional] transmission" (in Vansina's conceptualization, 1969: 21). Indeed, until further research, the three artisans from Izvoarele and Măneciu are actually "final informants" of what they say about their own crafts; their accounts represent "final testimonies" which the ethnographer can only collect as the "earliest written record," one relevant (or not) for "proto-testimonies" of "facts" belonging to ancestral traditions (Vansina 1969: 21).



4. See, for instance, the theoretical and methodological implications of doing *anthropology at home proper* in Romania. Thus, in the case of studying the researcher's own birth locality, "aggression and humility" (in anthropological knowledge) "can be surpassed" based on traits like "the adoption of local phonemic behaviour" and "the reflective characteristic of my profession"—all the more so because "psychically, I have never left my village [of Soveja, Vrancea County, Romania]" (Geană 2014: 97–113). For a general perspective on the organizing principles of open-air (sociological and ethnographic) museums in Romania (among which the Sibiu Museum of Folk Civilization, the Bucharest Village Museum, and the Cluj-Napoca Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania), see Academia de Științe... (1971). As regards a larger discussion on the epistemological and institutional condition of doing anthropology in post-socialist countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Russia, an important case-study resource is Skalník (2002).

5. See [www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=13307].

6. See [www.facebook.com/muzeuljudeteanstiintelenaturii prahova/videos/anthropology-international-day/748034415854095/].

7. See [www.facebook.com/muzeuljudeteanstiintelenaturii prahova/videos/programul-muzeului-de-%C5%9Ftiin%C5%A3e-ale-naturii-de-cercetare-a-artei-tradi%C5%A3ionale-din-/155292629768889].

8. See [www.facebook.com/muzeuljudeteanstiintelenaturii prahova/videos/ad%C4%83ug%C4%83m-seriei-noastre-de-convorbiri-etnografice-%C3%AEnceput%C4%83-%C3%AEn-18-februarie-cu-dl-/488317342300948/].

9. The social media coverage of AM, LM, and MC, with its local, institutional, and global layers of village workshops, museum archives, and social media platforms, may be compared with the "regressive quest for authenticity" of (Romanian) artisans identified first within a folk life festival in Washington, then in the open-air museums of Bucharest and Sibiu, and last in the artisans' home-based workshops in villages from Argeș, Iași, and Vrancea counties (Constantin 2015).

10. See also the "three groups of recipients" of the ethnography of a German village, namely the people in the village, the local press, and the television (Wübelmeier 2000: 45).

11. See, for instance, Ivo Strecker's exchange of experience with Baldambe, his informant and lifelong friend from the Hamar in Dambaiti, Southern Ethiopia, during the anthropologist's extended fieldwork among the Hamar, and then his invitation to Baldambe to travel to Europe in order to "help [Strecker's] courses" at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (Strecker 1998: 65).

12. In anthropological research, the ethnographic present is associated with "a timeless description of the people being studied," based on an approach that "implicitly denies the historicity of these people" (Davies 2002: 156–8). From another point of view, taking into account "specific generations" and different "sociocultural contexts" characterizing people that "the ethnographer knows and speaks to," the ethnographic present is reconsidered in relation to the "conjunctural nature of all ethnography" as a necessary "practice in anthropology" (Pina-Cabral 2000: 344, 347). As a result, the "ethnographic present" from the "philosophical" ideas of Prahova artisans should be integrated with the "conjunctural nature" of my interlocutors' different ages, as well as of my own ethnographic documentation for PNSM's Research of Folk Arts in Prahova County program.



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